



FOUNDATIONS OF AGAMASASTRA IN THE HINDU TEMPLE TRADITION: DEFINITIONS, CLASSIFICATIONS, AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

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ABSTRACT

In the landscape of Hindu religious practice, the Āgamas occupy a central place as authoritative texts that articulate the principles of ritual, iconography, temple architecture, and daily conduct. Though distinct from the Vedic corpus, they are revered within the Śaiva, Vaisnava, and Śākta traditions as divinely revealed scriptures that shape every aspect of temple worship and communal religious life. This study undertakes an introductory exploration of Āgamaśāstra, highlighting its terminologies, classifications, and internal structure. Emphasis is placed on clarifying key concepts as they relate to the construction, consecration, and functioning of temples.

Drawing from primary Sanskrit sources, including selected Āgamas, this paper also engages with the insights of G. B. Deglurkar, whose archaeological studies elucidate the intersection between textual prescriptions and architectural realities. The fourfold division of Āgamic texts into jñāna, yoga, kriyā, and caryā pādas reflects a holistic vision that integrates metaphysical knowledge with embodied ritual and social conduct. By tracing the essential frameworks of the Āgamas, the paper lays the groundwork for further investigation into their continued relevance in both classical and contemporary contexts.

This chapter forms the foundational segment of an ongoing doctoral study on the Agamic basis of temple tradition and aims to locate Āgamaśāstra within the broader discourse of Dharmaśāstra, ritual theory, and Sanskritic knowledge systems.

KEYWORDS: Āgamaśāstra, Hindu Temple Tradition, Śaiva Siddhānta, Vaisnava Pāñcarātra, Śākta Tantra, Temple Architecture, Ritual Procedure, G. B. Deglurkar

1. INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of Hindu ritual and temple culture, the Āgamas serve as the primary textual authorities that define the procedures of deity worship, temple layout, iconography, and priestly conduct. While the Vedas provide the metaphysical and sacrificial foundations of Hinduism, the Āgamas articulate the practical dimensions of devotional and liturgical life. Śaiva, Vaisnava, and Śākta sects each possess their own Agamic canon, regarded as divinely transmitted and transmitted through paramparā.

This chapter aims to establish the theoretical and practical foundations of Āgamaśāstra as a discipline, particularly in its relationship to temple construction and ritual activity. The discussion serves as a prelude to a larger thesis project exploring the temple as a confluence of scriptural, architectural, and social traditions.

2. ETYMOLOGICAL AND SCRIPTURAL POSITION

The term *Āgama* derives from the root *gam* ('to go') with the prefix *ā*, connoting "that which has come down" or "that which has been handed down." In theological usage, *Āgamas* are said to be *apauruseya* (not of human origin) and *anādi* (without

beginning), bearing scriptural authority within their respective domains. They function as the practical complements to the Vedas, governing the domains that the Vedas do not explicitly cover—especially icon-based worship and temple ritual.

In Śaiva and Śākta traditions, the Āgamas are revealed as direct discourses between Śiva and Pārvaṭī or between other deities and sages. The Vaisnava Āgamas, particularly the Pāñcarātra texts, are transmitted as revelations of Nārāyaṇa to various seers and deities. Thus, in all cases, they carry the weight of divine authorship and ritual authority.

3. CLASSIFICATION OF AGAMIC LITERATURE

The Agamic corpus is generally divided into three main streams, based on sectarian affiliation:

a) Śaiva Āgamas

Twenty-eight principal texts form the Śaiva canon, including *Kāmikāgama*, *Ajitāgama*, *Rauravāgama*, among others. These texts cover theological discussions, ritual prescriptions, temple construction, and ethical conduct. The Śaiva Āgamas are typically aligned with the dualistic metaphysics of Pati (Śiva), *Paśu* (the individual soul), and *Pāśa* (bondage).

b) Vaisnava Āgamas

These are divided into the *Pāñcarātra* and *Vaikhānasa* systems. The *Pāñcarātra Samhitās*—such as *Padma*, *Jayākhya*, and *Paramasamhitā*—emphasize *arcāvatāra* (iconic manifestations) and prescribe elaborate daily and festival rituals. The *Vaikhānasa* tradition, older and more conservative, retains close links with Vedic ritualism while adapting to temple contexts.

c) Śākta Āgamas or Tantras

Śākta Tantras, such as the *Rudrayāmala* and *Kālikā Tantra*, emphasize the worship of the Goddess (Devī) and involve complex mantra, yantra, and ritual systems. They frequently adopt non-dual or qualified non-dual philosophical positions and elaborate on the interplay of *śakti* (power) and *śiva* (consciousness).

All three streams generally conform to a fourfold textual division:

- **Jñāna-pāda:** dealing with metaphysics and doctrine.
- **Yoga-pāda:** detailing meditative and internal disciplines.
- **Kriyā-pāda:** providing prescriptions for rituals, temple building, and iconography.
- **Caryā-pāda:** concerning ethical conduct and daily life.

4. AGAMIC RITUALS AND TEMPLE PRAXIS

The Āgamas prescribe detailed procedures for all stages of temple development and usage:

- **Pratisthāvidhi** (installation rites): including *bimba-nyāsa*, *prāṇa-pratisthā*, and *netronmīlana*.
- **Pūjāvidhi** (daily worship): specifying *upacāras*, *mantras*, *mudrās*, and sequences of offering.
- **Utsavavidhi** (festival worship): outlining seasonal and annual celebrations, processions, and music.
- **Vastuvidhāna:** architectural dimensions, orientation, and cosmological alignments of the temple structure.

These rituals are designed not merely for symbolic efficacy but to effect the presence (*sāksātkāra*) of the deity in the image and to maintain the sanctity (*śuddhi*) of the temple environment.

5. MODERN SCHOLARSHIP: INSIGHTS FROM G.B. DEGLURKAR

Dr. G.B. Deglurkar's archaeological studies, particularly *All About The Temple*, offer valuable insight into the living expression of Āgamic norms in historical temple architecture. His work demonstrates how Āgamic stipulations—especially those related to iconometry, layout (mandala planning), and ritual process—are materially encoded in ancient temples across India.

Deglurkar correlates textual prescriptions from *Kāmikāgama* and other sources with actual structural and inscriptional evidence, offering a robust methodology for linking *śāstra* with *śilpa*. His studies also illuminate the convergence of Āgama with *vastuśāstra* and *śilpaśāstra*, especially in terms of iconographic grammar, sanctum design, and ceremonial space.

6. CONCLUSION

The Āgamas are far more than ritual manuals; they are comprehensive systems encompassing theology, cosmology, art, and ethics. Their influence has been decisive in shaping the Hindu temple as a sacred institution—integrating metaphysical symbolism with practical ritual and architectural expression.

This chapter has outlined the core foundations of Āgamaśāstra, tracing its definitions, textual classifications, and conceptual frameworks. In doing so, it provides the necessary groundwork for a deeper study into Āgamic ritual systems, regional practices, and their contemporary relevance. Further chapters in the doctoral project will explore these dimensions through specific case studies, field research, and philological analysis.

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